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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 164397

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KHUM](#)
SUBJECT: THE SECRETARY'S DECEMBER 3 MEETING WITH BELARUS
DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

(U) Classified by EUR Kurt Volker, Acting,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Participants:

U.S.

The Secretary
Ambassador Karen Stewart
Deputy Assistant Secretary David Kramer
EUR Stephen Gee (notetaker)

Belarus

Enira Bronitskaya, Human Rights Advocate
Dmitriy Fedaruk, Acting Leader of NGO, "Youth Front"
Sergey Kalyakin, Leader of Belarusian Party of Communists
Anatoliy Lebedko, Leader of United Civic Party
Anatoliy Levkovich, Acting Leader of Belarusian Social
Democratic Party, "Hramada"
Aleksandr Milinkevich, Leader of "For Freedom" NGO;
Pavel Severinets, Leader of Belarusian Christian Democracy

2. (C) SUMMARY. A delegation of human rights advocates
and pro-democracy political opposition from Belarus
described difficulties they face in carrying out their
activities. They expressed determination to continue their
work and asked the Secretary for continued U.S. financial
and moral support, and for firm and well coordinated
messages from the U.S. and EU toward the regime of
Aleksandr Lukashenka. Secretary Rice encouraged the group
to face future elections as a unified force, and assured
them the United States would continue to speak out for the
cause of freedom in Belarus. END SUMMARY.

Difficult Platform for Democracy

3. (C) Each member of the delegation praised U.S. support
for the cause of democracy and human rights in Belarus and
offered perspectives on the difficulties faced by
political opposition and pro-democracy NGOs in Belarus.
Aleksandr Milinkevich raised the plight of Belarus
political prisoners and also of large-scale detentions of
civil society activists in advance of pro-democracy
demonstrations. He compared current conditions in Belarus
to other parts of Central Europe five or more years ago,
and said Russian pressure on Belarus through energy prices
is contributing to deteriorating living conditions. Pavel
Severinets described increased repression by the regime of
Christian Protestants and Catholics. Enira Brontiskaya
said that young people -- particularly students -- were
being targeted by the regime and threatened with expulsion
and loss of financial assistance.

U.S. Assistance

14. (C) At the same time, each member of the delegation said they are determined to continue their work, and at the invitation of Secretary Rice, offered suggestions about how the United States could help in their efforts. Anatoliy Lebedko pinpointed the need for assistance for three areas: independent media (including satellite television); specific support for groups who are fighting for democracy such as students, entrepreneurs, and

political prisoners; and what he termed the "infrastructure" of pro-democracy organizations. Asked by Rice to clarify infrastructure, Milinkevich offered an example that it is difficult to find funds to pay for paper for printing and office rent, and there is insufficient access to independent media.

15. (C) The Secretary asked how our assistance could be more effective--specifically whether the coordination with the EU on assistance is as effective as the coordination on political issues. Lebedko said that assistance programs for Belarus need to be carried out inside Belarus, not in Europe. He acknowledged the difficulties of delivering assistance in Belarus, given harassment of NGOs and political parties that receive Western assistance. He noted, however that past efforts by the U.S. and EU to deliver strong messages jointly to Minsk and in Minsk, had been very effective as strong signals of

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Western unity in opposition to Lukashenka's repression.

Unity

16. (C) Anatoliy Levkovich stressed the need for the individual political forces to remain unified. He pointed out that the Unified Democratic Forces were still working together, despite leadership disagreements they had after the 2006 presidential election. Dmitriy Fedaruk pointed to the growing success and profile of the "Young Front" NGO, which he attributed to a large number of young people who are becoming fed up with the regime.

17. (C) Secretary Rice agreed that unity is essential, and pointed out that Milinkevich had a much stronger showing than had been expected in the 2006 election. This was due to the Unified Democratic Forces supporting a single candidate. She encouraged them to support joint candidates in future elections. She said she was encouraged by their current joint trip to the U.S. as a positive sign of their unity, and with the inclusion of the younger generation both in their work and in this delegation.

U.S. Support

18. (C) Kalyakin, echoed by others, stressed the signal importance of a meeting with the Secretary of State with pro-democracy representatives from such a small country as Belarus. The Secretary responded that completing Europe's democratic transformation is an important U.S. foreign policy goal, and that it would most certainly be carried on by the next President, regardless of political party. Picking up on Kalyakin's point, she said it doesn't matter that Belarus is a small country-- wherever people are struggling, the U.S. will speak out for their cause.
RICE